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### **It's time for Congress to raise fuel economy standards**

**By: David Muhly**

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Rising gasoline prices are putting a strain on American families. Sadly, the truth is that high gas prices are here to stay and that there isn't a short-term solution to bring down the price. What we can do is start cutting our dependence on oil by raising fuel economy standards.

Making our cars and trucks go farther on a gallon of gas is the biggest single step we can take to saving money at the gas pump, curbing global warming and cutting America's oil dependence. The technology exists today to make all vehicles -- from sedans to SUVs to pickup trucks -- get better fuel economy.

Even President Bush has recognized that we need to look at fuel economy standards. But his proposal only calls for changing the structure of the current system, not actually requiring automakers to improve fuel economy.

That's why the Sierra Club is supporting a bipartisan effort led by representatives Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and Edward Markey, D-Mass., to raise fuel economy standards to 33 miles per gallon within 10 years. This easily achievable plan would save more oil than the United States currently imports from the entire Persian Gulf -- 2.5 million barrels of oil per day. At the same time, it would save the average driver over \$3,800 at the gas pump over the lifetime of their vehicle.

Better fuel economy is not a new idea. In response to the first OPEC oil embargo, Congress passed the first fuel economy standards in 1975. These corporate average fuel economy standards succeeded in doubling the fuel economy of vehicles sold in the United States in 10 years.

By cutting America's dependence on oil, these standards broke OPEC's strangle hold over world energy markets.

But instead of continuing to raise standards over the past two decades, the auto industry has succeeded in blocking efforts in Congress to move forward. As a result, the average fuel economy of new vehicles sold today in the United States is at levels we reached in 1982.

The technology exists today to make all vehicles go farther on a gallon of gas. This can be done by using off-the-shelf technology like more efficient engines, smarter transmissions and better materials.

In poll after poll, Americans overwhelmingly support raising fuel economy standards. American consumers deserve to go on the lot of any auto dealership and find cars, trucks and SUVs that get good fuel economy. Right now, consumers are only given a handful of fuel-efficient options, such as hybrids. Raising fuel economy standards will ensure that consumers can choose between a wide range of fuel-efficient models without compromising safety.

It's too late to avert our current crisis, and most of the solutions being tossed around by Congress won't amount to a drop in the bucket. Instead of pointing fingers and ramping up the political rhetoric, it's time for Congress to move forward with an energy policy that uses smart energy solutions to cut America's oil dependence.

Any responsible plan must increase fuel economy standards, and the Boehlert-Markey legislation is the way to get there.

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